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Cuba skims millions from U.S. drug traffic

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(First of five articles)

(Arnaud De Borchgrave, for 17 years Newsweek's chief foreign correspondent, and Robert Moss, columnist for the London Daily Telegraph, teamed to write an exclusive series of articles on Cuban drug-running and subversion. They spent 12 months researching their subject. The resulting five-installment series originally was written for the New York Post.)

Cuba is an active partner in the drug traffic in the U.S. and skims the profits to the tune of tens of millions of dollars a year.

Fidel Castro's secret service, the DGI, orchestrates a drugs-for-arms barter trade between Marxist guerrillas and cocaine lords of Miami, Fla., and Medellin, Colombia.

It exacts 'tolls' from dopers who make stopovers in Cuba en route from Colombia to South Florida, and uses the receipts to finance undercover operations and to buy from dealers in the U.S. and West Europe weapons that are shipped clandestinely to guerrillas in Central America.

The most devastating evidence of the Cuban drug connection has resulted from an exhaustive investigation of Jaime Guillot Lara, a leading doper from Barranquilla, Colombia, who confessed to numerous contacts with DGI officers after his arrest in Mexico City on Nov. 25, 1981.

Under a deal negotiated with Colombia's President Julio Cesar Turbay Ayala, Guillot has promised to tell all in return for a reduced jail sentence of 18 months, to be served in his old stomping ground of Barranquilla.

Whether he will be able to keep that promise has yet to be seen; powerful interests — including well-connected drug magnates, the DGI and the M-19 (April 19th Movement) guerrilla organization — wish to ensure his silence.

However, we have been able to piece together the full story from police and counter-intelligence sources in South Florida, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela and Bolivia.

The story begins in Panama in the fall of 1980, when another Colombian underworld figure called Juan Lazaro Crump Perez — better known as 'Johnny' Crump — arranged a meeting between Guillot and high-ranking Cuban officials.

For several years, Crump had been on friendly terms with Fernando Ravelo, the Cuban ambassador in Bogota, and Gonzalo Bassols Suarez, the station chief of the Americas department of the Cuban Communist Party in Colombia.

The Americas Department, headed by Manuel Pineiro Losada, the former chief of the DGI, specializes in the Western hemisphere.

As early as 1975, the three men had spent several days together at the Prado Hotel in Barranquilla.

When Guillot made his first contact with the Cubans, he was a personable 33-year-old whose interests, financed by the drug traffic extended from a big real estate development at Barranquilla to a \$250,000 home on Sunset Drive in Miami.

He was also politically ambitious, and saw a glittering future for himself in the revolutionary overthrow of the Colombian government.

He had been a friend since childhood of Jaime Bateman, the founder of the M-19 guerrillas, who came from the same village of Santa Marta.

At their meetings in Panama — one of which took place at the home of Jose Luis Ojalvo, the local Americas Department chief, operating undercover at the Cuban Embassy — the Cubans flattered Guillot with the idea that they could not only help him to make a fortune, but saw him as a political president of Colombia.

At one early meeting, in November 1980, Bassols asked Guillot and his friend Johnny Crump to arrange transportation for a force of 300 guerrillas who were to be infiltrated into Chile.

Guillot also was instructed to purchase combat fatigues in the U.S. He was told that weapons would be supplied in Nicaragua, but he would have to arrange payment.

In 1980, Bassols Suarez gave him \$1 million in cash to finance arms purchases from dealers in South Florida.

In October 1981 (at a meeting in Mexico City) the Cuban spy chief gave Guillot another \$700,000 in cash, specifying that he should use it to buy American-made weapons that should be warehoused in the Miami area until they could be safely transported to Colombia's Guajira peninsula either by small planes from Fort Lauderdale, or by one of the Colombian's fleet of drug boats.

These included the Kanina, which eventually was sunk by the Colombian navy on Nov. 14, 1981, with a cargo of 200 tons of weapons and ammunition aboard, and a 62-foot shrimp boat called the Monarca.

Though the Cubans supplied seed money, the basic plan was that the arms purchases should be self-financing.

The M-19 guerrillas would help Guillot to smuggle marijuana, Quaaludes and cocaine out of Colombia; the Cubans would provide a safe anchorage, fuel and repairs for the drug boats, and Castro's secret service would recoup its initial expenditures — and reap a healthy profit — by charging Guillot a percentage of the value of his cargoes for services rendered.

The Cubans "taxed" the Colombian between \$500,000 and \$700,000 for each stopover that his drug boats made in Cuba. At the time of his arrest, he owed the Cubans \$8 million in unpaid dues.

Guillot was personally involved in a dramatic exchange that took place at a secret airstrip in the Guajira peninsula — Colombia's prime marijuana-producing region (in October 1981).

On Oct. 16, 1981, his boat Zar de Honduras offloaded 55 large crates and 90 smaller boxes at the small port of Dibulla. Each of the large crates contained 10 Belgian-made FN-Fal rifles; the small boxes each concealed 1000